A

SERMON,

PREACHED

IN THE PARISH CHURCH

OF

WHICKHAM,

ON SUNDAY, MAY 11th, 1800.

BY

JOHN BARNET, CURATE.

NEWCASTLE UPON TYNE:

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THE FOLLOWING

SERMON,

Is moſt reſpectfully dedicated

To his Pariſhioners, by

John Barnet, Curate.

SERMON.

HEB. xiii. 5.

——Be content with ſuch Things as ye have: for, He hath ſaid, I will never leave thee, nor forſake thee.

OPINIONS have been divided, and Diſputes have been raiſed, Whether Proſperity or Adverſity be more trying to human Virtue; or, in other Words, Whether, in a State of Eaſe and Affluence, Moderation and Self-denial be more neceſſary, than Fortitude and Patience are, in poor and afflictive Circumſtances.

The Truth is, that both theſe States have their Trials: both expoſe *us* to Difficulties and to Dangers. —If Health and Plenty tempt us (as they too often do) to forget ourſelves, and become impious and wicked; Poverty and Affliction no leſs ſubject us to *the ſame* Faults, by envying the more plentiful Allotments of other People, and growing diſſatisfied with our own.

It is to the *latter* of theſe Situations, that the Words of my Text particularly refer: in which words the Apoſtle exhorts Chriſtians, to bear up, with a becoming Spirit, under the Preſſures and Misfortunes of Life. *Be content* (ſays he) *with ſuch Things as ye have.*

Contentment is *that* Frame or Temper of Mind, which diſpoſes us to acquieſce in our Condition, and to believe it good and proper for us.—Such Acquieſcence, however, and ſuch a Belief, do not imply or require a

ſtupid Indifference to the Affairs and Intereſts of Life. As far as theſe can be promoted, by Induſtry, Sobriety, and prudent Forecaſt; ſo far *we* are *not only at Liberty*, but even *bound*, to do what we can for the bettering of our own Circumſtances. But, when this *is* done; when all, that a *diſcreet* Care and honeſt Diligence can accompliſh, has been tried by us: it is *then* the Province of Contentment to ſtep in, and incline us to be ſatisfied and pleaſed with the Lot, whatever *that* Lot may be, which is appointed for us.

And, doubtleſs, ſuch a Temper, when it may be acquired, is worth all the Pains that we can lay out upon it: as a ſure Mean, under God's Bleſſing, to enable us to enjoy Life in Peace and Comfort, without thoſe *fretful* and *tormenting* Cares, which, inſtead of benefiting or prolonging our Exiſtence, ſerve but to embitter and to ſhorten it.

But, a calm and contented Spirit is not to be obtained, without the Help of *religious Principles*. Of ourſelves, we are weak and imperfect Beings,—utterly inſufficient to our own Happineſs: And, in our *worldly* Purſuits, we muſt expect many Rivals or Competitors. He, therefore, who deſires and hopes for Contentment, muſt firſt be perſuaded, that there is a God above, who preſides over all, and without whoſe Permiſſion or Appointment Nothing *does* or *can* happen to any of us. *The Lot is caſt into the Lap*, ſaith Solomon; *but, the whole Diſpoſing thereof is of the Lord*. By which Obſervation, the royal Preacher wiſhes us to underſtand, that not the moſt fortuitous Event can befal any of us, without God's Leave; and, that we and our Intereſts are intirely in *his* Hand, to be ordered and determined as it ſeemeth beſt to his all-wiſe Providence. *For, the Kingdom is the Lord's; and, He is the Governor among the People.*

The Senſe of this is calculated, beyond moſt other Things, to keep Men humble and virtuous, in the moſt exalted Stations. It is alſo calculated, to baniſh all Deſpondency; to cheer the afflicted Soul; and cauſe us to go on our Way, rejoicing in the Aſſurance of *his* Pro-

Protection, who alone can ſhield us from Misfortunes and from Diſtreſs.

They, who expect to paſs the Time of their Sojourning here, without *diſagreeable* Occurrences of one Sort or another,—expect more, than ever yet hath happened to mortal Man, or ever will happen. For, as in the Seaſons, there is both Summer and Winter; and, as in the Weather, there are Clouds as well as Sunſhine: ſo, in human Life, there are, and muſt be, Good and Evil, Health and Sickneſs, Enjoyment and Suffering. And, it is for theſe *ſeverer* Trials of our Faith and Conſtancy, that the Admonition in the Text is intended. *Be content with ſuch Things as ye have: for, He* (that is, God) *hath ſaid, I will never leave thee, nor forſake thee.*

This Promiſe was originally made to the Patriarch Jacob, with the View of ſupporting him under the many Changes and Chances of Life, which ſtill awaited him.—But, the ſame Promiſe is equally deſigned for *every* Perſon, who ſhews the Diſpoſition to ſerve God, and be reſigned to his bleſſed Will, that Jacob ſhewed. *For, the ſame Lord over all is rich unto all, who call upon Him out of a pure Heart, and with Truſt unfeigned. —With Him is no Reſpect of Perſons: but, in every* Age and *Nation, they, who fear Him and work Righteouſneſs, are ſure of being accepted with Him.*

Accordingly, we find the above Promiſe repeated to the *Iſraelites*, to *Joſhua*, to *Solomon*, and to ſeveral others in After-times. Upon the ſame Ground alſo, St. Paul applies it to the State and Condition of Chriſtians in his own Time.—And, without Doubt, a more trying State cannot be, than Believers were *then* in. Their Maſter, though continually employed in doing Good to others, had, for his own Part, ſubmitted to a Life of the greateſt Poverty, and at laſt died a painful and ignominious Death. Nor had his immediate Diſciples and Followers any Thing better to expect. On the contrary, he foretold them, that they ſhould be hated and perſecuted of all Men for his Name's Sake, and ſubjected to the direſt Calamities which Man can ſuffer.

In the Infancy of his Church, *not many wiſe after the Fleſh, not many mighty, not many noble, were called. To the Poor*, and to them chiefly, was the *Goſpel* at firſt *preached*. And, the Diſtreſſes and Inſults, the Loſs and Forfeiture of *worldly* Comforts, which every where befel them, in Conſequence of embracing this new Religion, are well known to have been as great, as human Malice could invent, or human Power could occaſion. *They wandered about* from Place to Place, *being deſtitute, afflicted, tormented. Of whom the World was not worthy:* nor had it any Thing in it, that could pretend to compenſate for ſo much Contempt and Miſery.

Yet, after all theſe varied Ills, which the primitive Chriſtians had ſuffered, or might expect to ſuffer; St. Paul adviſes them to be *content with ſuch Things as they had;*—for this very weighty and convincing Reaſon, that the ſame God, who had been with them from the firſt, and protected them from the Womb, was ſtill with them, and would *never leave them, nor forſake them.*

And, to ſhew what Effect ſo conſoling a Reflection had on his own Mind, our Apoſtle elſewhere ſays, *I have learned, in whatſoever State I am, therewith to be content. I know both how to be abaſed, and how to abound: everywhere, and in all Things, I am inſtructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to ſuffer Need. I can do all Things, through Chriſt who ſtrengtheneth me.*

Well therefore may Chriſtians, in every ſucceeding Age of the Church, be called upon, to arm themſelves with the like Mind; and to beg of God *that* Strength from above, which is needful to fit them for meeting the *grievous* Events of Life, with a pious Firmneſs and Reſignation.

Would it not be right then, my Brethren; if, impreſſed with a due Senſe of our own Condition at this Time, we endeavoured to convert the Subſtance of the above Remarks to our Uſe and Improvement?

The Providence of God hath ſo ordered it, that an uncommon Scarcity of Proviſions ſhould at preſent be felt amongſt us;—a Scarcity, ſuch as the Inhabitants of this

this Iſland have long been Strangers to;—a Scarcity, which we, in the middle and lower Ranks of Life, have much Cauſe to deplore!

How, then, have we been affected by it? And, what has been our Behaviour under it? Have we conſidered it as the Lord's doing? Have we reflected, that it is one of his *ſore* Judgements, which He, from Time to Time, ſends upon the Earth, for the Puniſhment of Men's Sins; and, to convince them of what they are ſo unwilling to acknowledge, or ſo ready to forget,—that their Dependence for Support is, not upon themſelves alone, but upon Him who giveth Food unto all Fleſh?

Have we, I ſay, conſidered theſe Things as we ought? Or, have we not rather been actuated by a very different Spirit?

That the People of this Land have long enjoyed the Benefits of the Chriſtian Religion, to a much greater Extent than moſt other Kingdoms,—is a Fact, which we not only own, but even boaſt of. But, we alſo know, that Complaints have been often made, of our Negligence and Unprofitableneſs under the Means of Grace, and of our being far from *that* orderly and virtuous and pious People which we ought to be.

Of this, alas! the prevailing Temper of the Times is but too ſtriking and melancholy a Proof. For, inſtead of looking upon our preſent Wants as the Work of Providence, and becoming humbled under them; how common is it, to impute them to other cauſes; and to complain one of another, as if Man, and not God, had occaſioned this Dearth, under which we now labour!

Far be it from us, to apologize for thoſe, who take *unfair* Advantage of the Neceſſities of the Times. We envy them not their Gains. For, as the wiſe Man obſerves, *He that withholdeth Corn, the People ſhall curſe him.*—And, where the Curſe of the Poor is, there cannot be much Comfort.

But, if *other Men* do *wrong*, why ſhould *we* do *wrong* too? Will *their* Miſconduct juſtify *us* in taking *unlawful* and *diſhoneſt* Meaſures for Relief? Certainly not.——

Never

Never let us do *Evil*, then; that *Good* may come of it. Never let us ſuppoſe, that the *End* ſanctifieth the *Means*. If *theſe* be *bad*, *we* are to be blamed, who have Recourſe to them; and, the Iſſue of them to *ourſelves* muſt, ſooner or later, be dreadful.

Some have been fooliſh enough to imagine that by *Cunning*, and others that by *Force*, they could eſcape the Penalties of *human* Laws. Yet, in theſe Expectations they generally err, and in Courſe bring only Shame and Ruin upon themſelves. But, ſuppoſing them to be ſucceſsful in ſuch Efforts;—let us prevail with them to remember, that they are *all* anſwerable for their Actions to the *divine* Government: And, what God hath forbidden, and declared that He will puniſh; Man muſt be preſumptuous in the Extreme, if he knowingly and wilfully commits it.

In this Country, the beſt Laws have been made, that perhaps can be made, to prevent the Evils of Monopoly and Oppreſſion. And, that there is not, in the Nation at large, (whatever there may be in a few Individuals) a Diſpoſition to bear hard upon their Fellow-Subjects,—but, on the contrary, a Readineſs to pity and relieve them; is evident to us all: who cannot but obſerve, that, beſide the legal Proviſion which to ſo large an Amount is made for the Poor, ſuch additional Helps have been afforded, during the Winter, in almoſt every Neighbourhood, as are not to be paralleled in any other Country.

After all, however, that has been done, or that can be done, to alleviate or remove Diſtreſs; too many Inſtances of it ſtill remain, which cannot be remedied by human Means. That the Produce of the laſt Harveſt was unuſually ſcanty and defective, is what none of us will deny or queſtion: And that, in Conſequence of ſuch Deficiency, a proportionate Want muſt be felt ſomewhere, was naturally to be apprehended. Why, then, ſhould not each of us be willing to bear his Portion of it? Why do we not conſider, that, notwithſtanding the Deprivation which we now ſuffer in *ſome* Things, our Enjoyments are ſo great in *many* others, that there is not any

any other Nation, where the Bleſſings of Life are more generally diffuſed, or its Miſeries fewer, than in our own?

Inſtead, therefore, of delighting ſo much, as we have done, in unjuſt and uncharitable Cenſures, one of another; let us begin to contemplate our Situation more in a *religious* View. Let us often call to Mind the following Paſſage of Scripture; and, let it ſerve both for our Reproof and our Inſtruction.—After God had delivered the Iſraelites from the Bondage of Egypt, He ſoon thought fit to try their Faith and Confidence in Him, by ſubjecting them to the Want of common Neceſſaries. In this State, *the whole Congregation of the Children of Iſrael murmured againſt Moſes and Aaron in the Wilderneſs: And, the Children of Iſrael ſaid unto them, Would to God we had died by the Hand of the Lord in the Land of Egypt, when we ſat by the Fleſh-pots, and when we did eat Bread to the Full! for, ye have brought us forth into this Wilderneſs, to kill this whole Aſſembly with Hunger. —And Moſes and Aaron ſaid unto the Children of Iſrael, At Even, then ye ſhall know that the Lord hath brought you out from the Land of Egypt: And, in the Morning, then ye ſhall ſee the Glory of the Lord; for that He heareth your Murmurings againſt the Lord; and, what are we, that ye murmur againſt us? And Moſes ſaid, This ſhall be, when the Lord ſhall give you in the Evening Fleſh to eat, and in the Morning Bread to the Full: for that the Lord heareth your Murmurings, which ye murmur againſt Him: And, what are we? your Murmurings are not againſt us, but againſt the Lord.*

It is plain, from theſe Words, that Moſes reaſons with his Countrymen, upon the Belief of a ſuperintending Providence. And, admitting this ſacred Truth, he clearly proves to them, that their Diſſatisfaction with their preſent Circumſtances was, not merely finding Fault with him and their other Rulers, but likewiſe in Effect *murmuring againſt God.*

Now, theſe Things were written for *our* Admonition; to the Intent we ſhould not luſt after evil Things, as *they* alſo luſted. *Neither murmur ye*, ſays St Paul; *as ſome of them alſo murmured, and were deſtroyed of the Deſtroyer.*

ſtroyer. In our *preſent*, therefore, and in *all future* Difficulties, let us beware, how we indulge a fretful and repining Spirit; leſt haply we be found fighting againſt God.—Bad as we are, profane, extravagant, indolent, thoughtleſs, and ungrateful; we do not, ſurely, wiſh to quarrel with our Maker! *Shall we provoke the Lord to Jealouſy? Are we ſtronger than He?* Or, do we imagine, that we can any other Way be ſo ſafe, as under *his* bleſſed Care and Protection? If not,—why are we not at more Pains to deſerve his further Favors, by a thankful Uſe of what He hath already given us?

But, one common Fault in our Nature is this: We are far too apt to *think more highly of ourſelves, than we ought to think.* Our Maker, therefore, may be as kind to us, as ever He pleaſes. His Promiſes, and his Bleſſings, be they ever ſo numerous or ſo great, we claim all to ourſelves, without once diſputing our Title to receive them.—But, no ſooner does He turn away his Face, and frown upon us; than we immediately grow ſullen and diſſatisfied; queſtion the Juſtice of his Proceedings; and conclude, that his Ways are harſh and unequal towards us. Such indeed, and no better, is the Wiſdom of this World: it leads us into Impiety, and leaves us in Deſpair.

But, what ſaith the Apoſtle in my Text? *Be content with ſuch Things as ye have.* Believe, that they come from the Diſpoſer of all Events, who will give you more as He ſees fit, and will *feed you with Food convenient for you. For, He hath ſaid, I will never leave thee, nor forſake thee. Having loved his own that are in the World, He loveth them unto the End;* and, is as *willing* as He is *able, to do for them abundantly, above all that they can either aſk or think.*

All this we might well believe, ſolely upon the Authority of him who hath ſaid it. But, if *that* be not enough, look *back* into the Experience of paſt Years, and ſee, what Plenty of good Things we have long had, in Spite of all our Abuſe and Perverſion of them. Look *forward* alſo to the Appearances, which are now before us,

of

of a moſt favorable Seaſon. And, let theſe Thoughts cheer us, amidſt our preſent Difficulties.

Obſervation and Experience hold out ſeveral uſeful and important Leſſons to Mankind. For which Reaſon, the great Lawgiver of the Jews hath left us this friendly Exhortation. *Take Heed to thyſelf, and keep thy ſoul diligently; leſt thou forget the Things which thine Eyes have ſeen, and leſt they depart from thy Heart, all the Days of thy Life.*

Now, the only End and Deſign of the more awful Diſpenſations of Providence is, to draw us nearer to God, when his Mercies had eſtranged us from Him. *Before I was troubled, I went wrong*, ſays the Pſalmiſt: *but, now have I kept thy Word.*

Can *we* ſay, then, that our late and preſent Diſtreſſes have thus made us more religious and virtuous, than we formerly were? Or, are we inclined, that they ſhall do ſo?

Our Saviour hath left us, in his Sermon on the Mount, ſo irreſiſtible an Argument againſt all Anxiety and Uneaſineſs about *bodily* Wants, that it is hardly poſſible for us to read it attentively, without finding our Cares ſink and die away before it. His Argument is taken from the Objects around us; which he directs us to obſerve, and from them to believe, that if God feed the Fowls of the Air and clothe the Lilies of the Field, (which he certainly does) much more will he take of *Us*, on doing our Duty in *that* State of Life unto which He hath been pleaſed to call us, a Care proportioned to the Superiority of our Nature.—Food and Raiment were the Things, after which the *Gentiles* or *Heathens* ſought; and, they ſought for Nothing elſe. But, the *Direction* to *Chriſtians* is, that they ſhould ſeek *firſt* the Kingdom of God and his Righteouſneſs; and then, the *Promiſe* is, that all other Things ſhould be added unto them.—So manifeſt, indeed, is God's Interference, in Favor of his faithful Servants, even in this World; that King David hath, long ago, left it upon Record, as an Obſervation which might induce *ſelfiſh* Minds to become religious, when other Arguments failed. *I have been young,*

young, ſays he, *and now am old: yet, ſaw I never the righteous forſaken, nor his Seed begging their Bread.*

If then, eſpecially in a Country like this, We be deſtitute of common Neceſſaries; it is, I fear, becauſe we have not been ſo induſtrious, ſo prudent, ſo temperate, or ſo pious, as we ſhould have been. We have begun at the wrong End of our Work: we have made *that laſt*, which ought to have been *firſt*; and *that firſt*, which ought to have been *laſt*. Religion and its Duties have been too much neglected by us. The world hath been our Favorite: and, we have truſted to our own Schemes and Purſuits in it, till dear-bought Experience at length convinces us of our Folly, by the Vexations and Diſappointments, with which it is attended.

Would we, then, retrieve our Miſcarriages: and, do we wiſh to live in greater Comfort and Security for the future?—We have the Remedy in our own Power.—Diſreſpect to God and his Laws hath brought us into great Difficulties: Our Return to Him muſt reſcue us from them.—*Draw nigh to God, and He will draw nigh to you: for, if ye ſeek Him, He will be found of you.—Delight thou in the Lord, and be doing Good: dwell in the Land, and verily thou ſhalt be fed. - Commit thy Way unto the Lord, and put thy Truſt in Him; and He ſhall bring it to paſs: He ſhall make thy Righteouſneſs as clear as the Light, and thy juſt Dealing as the Noon-day.—Hold thee ſtill in the Lord, and abide patiently upon Him: For, wicked Doers ſhall be rooted out; but, they that fear the Lord ſhall want no Manner of Thing that is good.*

May God, in Mercy, convince us of all this: and, grant us Grace, *ſo to paſs through Things temporal, that we finally loſe not the Things which are eternal!*

Finis.

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